

SECOND SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY

18 January 2026

Isaiah 49. 1-7

1 Corinthians 1.1-9

John 1.29-42

Our Gospel reading this morning is from John. John is the Gospel writer who doesn't fit into the mould of the other three. He gives only the facts which in his view are essential in order to understand the underlying message: it reads like a testimony, as though someone were interviewing him about what he had seen and witnessed. So, for example, John the Baptist makes it clear that he knew exactly why he had been called to do what he did, to point the way to Jesus. He also declares that he had been told by God how he would recognise Jesus when he arrived "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit". John goes on to testify that Jesus is the Son of God. Our reading continues with the calling of the first disciples.

The other Gospel writers are more or less concerned to tell us the names of those who have been chosen to support Jesus in his ministry. Mark chapter 3 gives us the names of all the disciples, and also says that they were called and appointed, firstly, to be with Jesus, secondly, to be sent out to proclaim the message, and thirdly, to have authority to cast out demons. It is not difficult for us to relate to the first two, and the third is something we might express today as "praying for healing, wholeness and the forgiveness of sins".

Matthew chapter 10 gives us quite a comprehensive overview of the instructions Jesus gave to his disciples, in addition to the things Mark mentions.

Jesus is at pains to prepare his new friends for all the situations they will find themselves in, beginning with the instruction to "go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel", in other words, to start at home. Later on of course, after his resurrection, he encourages them to make disciples of all nations, echoing Isaiah in this morning's first reading. But for the time being it is good for them to concentrate on their immediate environment, being Israel with all its problems and expectations.

Next comes Jesus's reminder to his disciples that the gifts they are endowed with were given by God freely, without the need for any payment; therefore they should similarly give without expecting any payment in return. We ourselves do well to remember that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is good and is free ! There is no charge. As if to push the point home, Jesus even says the disciples should not carry any money or spare clothing with them, partly so as not to create any misunderstandings, but also to elicit hospitality – “for labourers deserve their food” (verse 10). So here is a message for us, about being prepared to open our doors to visitors or strangers, because we may well end up entertaining angels.

Then Jesus has a word about the kind of reception his disciples may receive: “if the house is not worthy, let your peace (which you have offered) return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet” and move on. I think that is very helpful to us in situations where we are trying to explain the Christian faith but come to realise that our listeners don't want to listen. Rather than get into an argument it is better for us to withdraw, and perhaps give our listeners a chance to think about what we have said. Jesus does highlight the dangers we may face, saying “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves” but he also gives sound advice “so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves”. We are to use all the worldliness we can muster so as to be able to engage with anyone and everyone, but to allow our Christian faith to shine through – easier said than done, you're probably thinking. Above all we are not to deny or betray God in what we say. But however difficult the situation we find ourselves in, we are to trust in God's Holy Spirit who will give us the words to speak when we need them.

All this good advice from Jesus, and more, is recorded in Matthew chapter 10 and is well worth reading. The instructions given by Jesus to his disciples, who came from all walks of life, are an invaluable reminder to us that we are all called to be his disciples, in fact to be saints, in one form or another. It is always a good time to be thinking about this. Our call to be his disciples may express itself in the form of ordained ministry, or in one of the licensed ministries, as our nine Elders are doing at the moment, or simply in taking on a job that needs to be done. But most importantly of all every Christian is called to bear witness to God's love for his Creation, including his people, culminating in his gift to us of his son Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we have an extra special reason to be thinking and praying about this: the parents and godparents of new-born children decide they want to give them the chance to experience this call and so bring them for baptism, so that they might come to know the nature of God's love for themselves. John records Jesus as saying to the first disciples "what are you looking for ?" and in response to their rather confused question merely says "come and see".

It is obvious that to bear full and true witness to this overwhelming love we should be sure of the tenets of our faith and confident of explaining them. Above all we should remember the words of Jesus towards the end of Matthew 10: "Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me". This is what we do for newly baptised children, in fact for everyone of any age who feels that call. Like them we are all invited to come and see, and what better time to do so than this evening, which represents the beginning of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at the Quay Church. See you there at 7pm.

PBW

17.1.2026